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ABSTRACT

The main objectives of this meeting held in Brazzaville, People's Republic of Congo from July 5 to 10, 1976 were to examine recent efforts made by African Member States to plan and develop their national information systems (NATIS), and make recommendations for the creation of networks of documentation and library services adapted to the rapidly evolving needs of African users. This document summarizes the meeting under the following headings: (1) Introduction, (2) Participants, (3) Opening of the Session, (4) Election of the Bureau, (5) Agenda, (6) Summary of the Discussions, and (7) Summary of the Recommendations. Lists of meeting participants and the organizations which observed the session are provided in the appendix. (Author/JAB)

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SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Meeting of Experts on Planning Documentation and Library Networks in Africa (NATIS)

Brazzaville, People's Republic of Congo

5-10 July 1976

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FINAL REPORT

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(COM-76/CONF.610/COL.2)

I. INTRODUCTION

The Meeting of Experts on Planning Documentation and Library Networks in Africa (NATIS) was held in Brazzaville, People's Republic of Congo, from 5 to 10 July 1976, in accordance with resolution 4.221 adopted by the General Conference at its eighteenth session.

This meeting, convened by the Director-General of Unesco was organized with the co-operation of the Government of the People's Republic of Congo. The main objectives were:

to examine recent efforts made by African Member States to plan and develop their national information systems (NATIS);

to make recommendations for the creation of networks of documentation and library services adapted to the rapidly evolving needs of African users.

II. PARTICIPANTS

Sixteen experts invited by the Director-General of Unesco were the principal participants in the meeting. In addition three international organizations sent observers. The Unesco Secretariat was represented by two members of the staff of the Division of Documentation, Libraries, Archives and Book Promotion. The full list of participants is included as an annex to this document.

III. OPENING OF THE SESSION

The meeting was formally opened by H.E. François OKOBO, Minister of Primary and Secondary Education at the Conference Centre of the Union Africaine et Malgache des Postes et Télécommunications (UAMPT). Speaking on this occasion the Minister called the attention of the participants to the importance for Africa of preserving its cultural heritage and mentioned in this connexion that "in Africa an old man who dies is a library which burns". He also mentioned that a poorly organized library is a cemetery of books and that to give complete efficiency to libraries and documentation centres it is essential to place particular importance on the training of personnel.

Citing the project for the creation in Brazzaville of a Department of Information Sciences and Techniques at the Higher Institute (Institut supérieur) of economic, legal, administrative and management sciences, the Minister stressed the necessity of promoting and encouraging regional institutions.

Earlier the Director-General of Library, Archives and Documentation Services had welcomed the participants to the People's Republic of Congo and explained the rôle of his service (D.G.S.B.A.D.) before presenting an outline of the draft plan for the creation of a Department of Information Sciences and Techniques.

The representative of the Director-General of Unesco expressed the thanks of the Organization to the Government of the People's Republic of Congo for acting as host to the meeting and explained its aims and objectives.

IV. ELECTION OF THE BUREAU

The following were elected as members of the Bureau:

Chairman: Mr. S. Bathéas-Mollomb (Congo)

Vice-Chairmen: Mr. S.B. Aje (Nigeria)
Mrs. G. Sheriff (Sierra Leone)

Rapporteur: Mr. A. Bousso (Senegal)

V. AGENDA

The subjects of the agenda were taken up in the following order:

(1) Significant developments in the documentation and library fields in Africa since the Kampala Meeting.

(2) Planning National Information Infrastructures in African countries:

(a) Legislation

(b) Creation of co-ordinating bodies

(c) Universal Bibliographic Control

(d) Planning for education and training of specialized manpower

(e) Implementation of NATIS to suit the evolving needs of various groups of users.

(3) Unesco's programme of action for assisting Member States in Africa in planning and developing national information systems (NATIS).

VI. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

A. Significant developments in the documentation and library fields in Africa since the Kampala Meeting

The participants described the conditions prevailing in their countries as far as library and documentation infrastructures were concerned against the background of the working document (CC-76/CONF.610/3) prepared for the meeting. In general the present situation was considered very unsatisfactory. If there seems to be a recognition in many African countries of the value of the recommendations and objectives put forward at the Kampala Meeting(1) and the Intergovernmental Conference in Paris(2) it is a fact that their implementation often remains incomplete.

Legislation in the areas under consideration still does not exist in some countries and is very restricted in others. The scarcity of qualified personnel and the insufficiency of legal deposit text does not simplify the organization of national bibliographic control. There has been a growing awareness since the Intergovernmental Conference that to be workable an information policy must be based on a rational programme for training of manpower to perform at all levels and in all relevant environments.

In the discussions which followed the participants also used as working documents, the Final Report of the Intergovernmental Conference cited above as well as the Unesco publications National Information Policy (COM-76/NATIS/6) and Design and Planning of National Information Systems, a paper for government planners (COM-76/NATIS/7). During the meeting, the resolutions of the conference of African librarians on the future of library systems in Africa held in Accra in September 1975, were presented and commented on by the participant from Ghana. There was an interesting exchange of views on these resolutions. There was full agreement with the spirit of them, but it would be necessary in some countries to adapt them to local circumstances.

(1) Expert Meeting on National Planning of Documentation and Library Services in Africa, Kampala, Uganda, 7-15 December 1970, Final Report (COM/MD/18).

(2) Intergovernmental Conference on the Planning of National Documentation, Library and Archives Infrastructures, Paris, 23-27 September 1974, Final Report (COM/MD/30).

B. Planning National Information Infrastructures in African Countries

1. Legislation

After having surveyed the situation in a certain number of African countries the participants took up the problem of legislation within the framework of NATIS. A number of participants stressed the need to create a legal framework for NATIS but others felt that while awaiting the establishment of a legal framework the profession had to undertake the task of arousing interest among its own members.

The discussion then turned to the problem of legal deposit which is the basis for Universal Bibliographic Control (Objective No. 12). It was unanimously agreed that particular emphasis had to be placed on the creation or the revision of legal deposit in order to arrive at the control of the entire intellectual production of the nation.

Concerning the problem of a co-ordinating body the participants shared similar points of view, and it appeared important to create a flexible framework which would permit preliminary work on the implementation of NATIS and the development of national infrastructures; it seemed advisable to establish a special commission composed of representatives from all branches of the profession while awaiting formal action by the Government to set up a co-ordinating body and a legal framework for NATIS.

2. Creation of co-ordinating bodies

The discussions on this item bore on the nature and the objectives of the co-ordinating body. Several delegates expressed the view that this body should establish a link between the Government and the profession. Other delegates felt that it was not necessary to await the enactment of full formal legislation creating an official organ of co-ordination before undertaking this work.

It was unanimously agreed that while awaiting the establishment of a legal framework an informal group representing the different branches of the profession could have as objectives:

(a) co-ordinating efforts

(b) distributing tasks

(c) creating a dialogue among professionals

In any case the participants felt that the most urgent task is to disseminate at all levels (professional, decision-making, users) general information concerning the objectives of NATIS and the possibilities offered to a country by the realization of this concept.

It is clear that the spreading of this information should start within the profession which must create the conditions for an effective dialogue with the decision-making bodies of government.

In this connexion it was requested that Unesco, to the extent possible, keep professionals informed about questions in this field raised with governments and that it keep the profession and governments informed about the various activities undertaken in Member States within the framework of NATIS through as wide as possible a distribution of NATIS News, an offprint of the Unesco Bulletin for Libraries.

It was clear however that ultimately it would be necessary to arrive at precise legislation which would define the task of the co-ordinating body.

3. Universal Bibliographical Control

The participants considered at length Objective 12 which states that the concept of Universal Bibliographic Control presupposes the establishment in each country of National Bibliographic Control with its aim to ensure that a bibliographic record for each new publication is made when the publication is issued.

The discussion which followed revealed that the application of universal bibliographic control encounters serious difficulties in countries where legal deposit often does not exist, or is poorly adapted to the needs or poorly applied, where the lack of personnel is endemic and where the lack of means is great.

The wish was expressed that seminars be organized concerning the problem of universal bibliographic control, so as to publicize Objective 12 and facilitate the application in African countries of ISBD(M) and ISBD(S).

The delegates also expressed the hope that Unesco give particular attention to the problems encountered by many countries in the creation, the functioning or the development of national libraries and that it offer, as much as possible, technical and material assistance in order to ameliorate this situation.

The participants felt that, in the absence of a National Library, to which the elaboration of the current national bibliography would normally be entrusted other institutions such as the University Library should undertake this task.

4. Personnel

Before coming to this particular item of the agenda, the participants were reminded of Objectives 6 and 8 of NATIS, which deal respectively with the analysis of manpower resources and the necessity to supply the national infrastructure with the manpower required for its satisfactory functioning.

Several participants stressed the importance of the manpower problem in the implementation of NATIS and expressed the necessity of identifying the short- medium- and long-term needs, starting with an analysis of existing resources.

Others underlined the importance of foreseeing the creation of posts for those returning from training programmes and the creation of suitable conditions of employment for the profession which might encourage newly trained professionals to become established in the profession.

A number of participants specified that to satisfy the needs of African countries for professional staff at all levels it would be necessary to place training facilities at their disposal, in particular through the creation of new regional schools and through extensive fellowship programmes.

In this connexion the Congolese delegate described to the participants a draft project for the creation of a Department of Information Sciences and Techniques within the framework of the "Institut supérieur des sciences économiques, juridiques, administratives et de gestion". It was hoped that this project would be realized after consultation with the existing schools and appropriate contacts with interested countries.

The delegates unanimously recognized the need to improve the functioning of the existing schools, to raise the level of training and to ensure the preparation of teachers.

Several participants felt that it would be useful to include courses on NATIS in the teaching programmes as well as courses on anthropology, the oral tradition and languages.

The participants stressed that not only was it necessary to provide training facilities and enact professional statutes but also of the highest importance was providing for continuing education of staff at all levels in order that they may keep abreast of the rapidly evolving science and technology in the field.

Several participants mentioned the resolution which had been adopted at the Kampala Meeting concerning the need to organize research in African schools and that adopted at the Dakar Meeting of directors of African library schools concerning the elaboration of textbooks adapted to African needs and realities.

C. Unesco's programme of action for assisting Member States in Africa in planning and developing National Information Systems (NATIS)

The representative of the Director-General of Unesco presented that part of document 19 C/5 (Draft Programme and Budget for 1977-1978) which deals with national information systems with an emphasis on the activities proposed for Africa. This document has been submitted to governments and will be considered by the nineteenth session of the General Conference of Unesco to be held in Nairobi in October 1976. The participants took note of these activities and of the procedures to be followed at the national level for formulating requests.

VII. SUMMARY OF MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to the Director-General of Unesco

This meeting recommends to the Director-General of Unesco:

1. That Part II of the Working Document CC-76/CONF.610/3 be revised to reflect the situation existing in 1976 and published.

2. That a massive programme of fellowships for training personnel at all levels be prepared for Member States to ensure the rapid implementation of NATIS.

3. That Unesco lend to African countries its intellectual and material support for the organization at the national level of seminars for the discussion of implementing NATIS.

4. That intellectual and material support be given to African Member States in order to facilitate the creation of national libraries or for the improvement of the organization and structure of those which exist.

5. That Unesco do everything possible: to promote the rapid development of post-graduate schools in the African region in order to meet the needs for personnel at this level; to encourage the undertaking of post-graduate education at EBAD, a school which has proved itself in the preparation of middle-level personnel.

6. That Unesco prepare an intensive programme for training African teachers to meet the present and future needs of African schools for teachers of subjects related to modern technology.

7. That Unesco make every effort to avoid the introduction in Africa of artificial distinctions between the training of librarians, documentalists and archivists and encourage the introduction of courses in each of these areas in the programmes of African schools.

8. That Unesco ensure the organization in Africa and elsewhere of intensive courses on planning theory and techniques for senior practising librarians, documentalists and archivists.

9. That Unesco encourage agreement among the African schools to ensure a genuine harmonization and that Unesco promote periodic meetings among these schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEMBER STATES

A. National Information Infrastructures

The participants affirmed their agreement with Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 of NATIS which relate to national action notably:

(1) That "a national information policy, reflecting the needs of all sectors of the community and the national community as a whole, should be formulated to guide the establishment of a national information plan, whose elements should be fully incorporated in the national development plans".

(2) That in order to increase user awareness and to foster the reading habit it is necessary on the one hand to assess users' needs and on the other to survey existing means for meeting these needs, in particular the existing library, documentation and archives resources and personnel.

In this connexion the participants recommend:

(1) That seminars which would bring together those responsible for documentation, library and archives services be organized at the national level in order that the rapid implementation of NATIS may take place under favourable conditions.

(2) That professional organizations participate actively in organizing an information programme about NATIS and contribute through their action to the promotion in each country and at all levels of NATIS and its objectives.

(3) That there be prepared in each country a directory of existing institutions and of practising personnel.

(4) That a special commission composed of members of all branches of the profession be created while awaiting the creation by the government of a co-ordinating body and a legislative framework for NATIS.

Noting that the resolutions of the Conference of African Librarians on the future of library systems in Africa held in Accra in September 1975 are in harmony with the recommendations of the Unesco Intergovernmental Conference, the meeting endorses their spirit and urges their implementation to the extent that they are practicable in the various African countries.

B. Universal Bibliographic Control

The participants having affirmed their agreement with Objective 12 of NATIS which states that the "concept of Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC) presupposes the establishment in each country of National Bibliographic Control with its aim to ensure that a bibliographic record for each new publication is made when the publication is issued" recommend:

(1) That a seminar be organized in each country by the members of the profession to study the means for the implementation of national bibliographic control based on the principles of Universal Bibliographic Control. The seminar should concentrate its action on:

(a) the creation or revision of legal deposit arrangements to ensure the control of the entire national production;

(b) the adoption by the appropriate institutions of ISBD(M) and of ISBD(S);

(c) the preparation of a national bibliography.

(2) That institutions responsible for the preparation of the national bibliography take the necessary measures to prepare for active participation in the international congress for the improvement of national bibliographic control which will be organized by Unesco in 1977.

(3) That an intensive effort be given to book promotion in Africa through assisting in the creation, in a first phase, of regional publishing houses while awaiting the establishment or improvement of national publishing houses with the objective of encouraging production in each country. In addition, the creation where they do not exist, of National Book Councils and the organization in African universities of courses on book promotion is recommended.

C. Education and training of specialized manpower

(1) Having recognized the soundness of Objectives 6 concerned with the analysis of manpower resources and 8 which treat supplying manpower for NATIS and having noted that although many of the Kampala recommendations had been implemented by Unesco and Member States, the continued scarcity of personnel at all levels remains disquieting. The participants therefore recommend:

(a) the preparation or improvement of professional statutes for those groups involved in NATIS implementation in order to encourage documentalists, librarians and archivists to become established and at the same time to take concrete measures to ensure that those receiving fellowships remain in the profession;

(b) undertaking the necessary measures to assist existing schools to offer courses at a higher level and participate actively in the preparation of basic texts which conform to African needs and realities.

(2) While noting with satisfaction the efforts already undertaken by Unesco and Member States to ensure the training in Africa of qualified personnel, in the interests of balance and coverage, the meeting recommends the creation of additional schools of a regional character where basic infrastructures exist and where national efforts have been made in order to meet the extensive needs of Africa in the field. In this connexion the meeting notes with satisfaction the steps now being taken by the Government of the People's Republic of Congo towards the creation of a new school.

(3) The participants emphasize the necessity for a rational programme of continuing education at all levels and recommend that steps be taken to see that such programmes be undertaken and generalized.

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